

Bivitelline twins: the concepts of transculturation and interpenetration in the works of Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre

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Abstract

This paper draws a comparison between Fernando Ortiz's concept of "transculturation" and Gilberto Freyre's idea of "interpenetration". To that end, we focus on the most important book of each author. The first one, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, published in 1940, emphasised the importance of the two agricultural crops in Cuba's economic system and their influence on its racial formation. The second text, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, published by Gilberto Freyre in 1933, explored the dynamics of the sugar cane plantation and its implications for the lives of whites and blacks in Brazil. Both texts offered a general theory of their societies and, as such, show how the interpretations of two Latin American contexts point in relatively similar directions, but with subtle particularities.

Keywords

Fernando Ortiz; Gilberto Freyre; transculturation; interpenetration; race

Gêmeos Bivitelinos: os conceitos de transculturação e interpenetração em Fernando Ortiz e Gilberto Freyre

Resumo

Este artigo constrói uma comparação entre o conceito de "transculturação" em Fernando Ortiz e a ideia de "interpenetração" em Gilberto Freyre. Para isso, focamos nas principais obras de cada um dos autores. Na primeira, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*, publicada no ano de 1940, Ortiz enfatizou a importância dos dois cultivos agrícolas na matriz econômica de Cuba e a influência sobre a sua formação racial. A segunda, *Casa Grande & Senzala*, publicada por Gilberto Freyre em 1933, explorou as dinâmicas do engenho de cana-de-açúcar e suas implicações na vida de brancos e negros no Brasil. Ambos os textos propuseram uma teoria geral sobre as suas respectivas sociedades e, nesse sentido, manifestam como as interpretações de dois contextos latino-americanos apontam para direções relativamente semelhantes, mas com sutis particularidades.

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Palavras-chave

Fernando Ortiz; Gilberto Freyre; transculturação; interpenetração; raça.

Introduction

This paper seeks to compare the concepts of “transculturation” and “interpenetration” as articulated in the works of Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre, respectively. Each national context has spawned its unique Latin American narratives. Despite the inclusion of foreign references, many intellectuals have emphasized to aspects intrinsic to the social fabric of their respective countries. In this regard, the works of Gilberto Freyre and Fernando Ortiz underscored a perspective that acknowledges the national attributes inherited by the Iberian colonization, evident in both Brazil and Cuba. Thus, their works delve into extensive reflections grounded in American anthropology and a consistent concern for the positively appraising sociogenesis within their nations. Nevertheless, some discrepancies emerge in their ideas.

Given that our analysis focuses on comparing the authors’ main works, *Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar* and *Casa Grande & Senzala*^{*}, we will not delve into the periods preceding or following their publication. For instance, we will not discuss Ortiz’s initial racist stance and his later engagement in combating discourses that marginalized subaltern colonial groups; nor will we examine Gilberto Freyre’s earlier works, which still reflected a certain disqualification of dominated groups (OLIVEIRA, 2012). Both texts aim to delineate the fundamental contours of Cuban and Brazilian societies, shaped by cultural dynamics rooted in Iberian colonization. However, as we delve deeper, the complexities of each book become more apparent. It is essential to differentiate two pivotal themes in the development of these texts, recognizing that distinct—yet closely related—concepts engender similar imperatives while also addressing the specificities of each reality. Thus, our inquiry revolves around a structural comparison of the ideas of “interpenetration” and “transculturation,” both of which seek to justify cultural, racial, or ethnical blending within these societies.

The analysis presented here is rooted in John’s linguistic contextualism, as emphasized by Pocock’s attempt to understand these texts beyond mere hermeneutics. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize that the comparison is predicated upon a shared Latin American universe. In this light, we view Freyre’s and Ortiz’s works as products of their respective space and time, whose appropriations of reality and theory correspond to the consolidation of Social Sciences in Latin America. Such a historical approach to social and political thought enables us to grasp the interrelations between these books and to their contemporaneity (POCOCK, 2003). Pocock’s work, *The Reconstruction of Discourse*:

* T.N. The books “*Contrapunteo cubano del tabaco y el azúcar*” and “*Casa Grande e Senzala*” were officially translated and launched in English with the following adapted titles: “Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar” and “The Masters and The Slaves,” respectively. However, the translators decided to maintain the original names in the language they were originally published.

Towards the Historiography of Political Thought (1981) focuses on reconstructing political thought as discourse, situating the context within a series of speeches acts articulated by agents within a given social structure, historical background, or political language. Both authors' concepts stem from a shared lexicon, facilitating the interpretation of cultural encounters.

Using language, the perlocutionary aspect of the speeches effects on the receiver, a concept defined by Skinner (1969) and Pocock (1981) as the transformative force for political ideas in shaping reality. Linguistic action emanates from the vocabulary inherent to the interpretative structure of the region, with texts aimed altering this situation to align with the authors' interpretations. In *O conceito de linguagem e o métier d'historien* (POCOCK, 2003), Pocock employs linguistic terms to illustrate that speech acts would represent a *parole* inserted in a *langue* (speech in a context). This dialogue explores the linguistic resources derived from a shared universe of references and experiences. (POCOCK, 1990, p. 963). The works of Freyre and Ortiz contribute to a broader effort to comprehend the formation of the Latin American society as a confluence of diverse cultures. Moreover, both texts endeavor to establish a sociology framed in local terms.

Gilberto Freyre's work reflects a significant influence of Portuguese traditions. Among Lusophiles, there was a prevailing notion that overseas colonization posed an immeasurable challenge for the Portuguese, who had to govern such a vast territory with a limited human contingent. It was believed that certain characteristics inherent in Portuguese culture helped to alleviate this purported scarcity of manpower. Freyre highlights factors such as the insufficient number of white women, the adaptable nature of the colonizers, and the semifeudal organization of the territory as elements that, to some extent, mitigated this demographic shortfall. (FREYRE, 1987).

Cuba, on the other hand, fell under Spanish dominion in 1512. Fernando Ortiz voiced criticism against the Crown's excessive control, particularly upon realizing the economic opportunities the island held. Alongside highlighting the metropolis' grip on the region, the author underscored the parallelism between the cultivation of tobacco and sugarcane (ORTIZ, 1978). The struggle for Independence, only achieved through United States intervention towards the end of the 19th century, also emerges as a concern. Subsequently, criticism of American influence became a recurring theme in Cuban politics.

This paper's argument also engages in a critical dialogue with the work of Emerson de Oliveira, who pioneered the comparative analyses between the two authors. While scholars like Elide Rugai had previously referenced this connection, Oliveira was the first to systematically explore it. His approach focused on the intellectual trajectories of Freyre and Ortiz, and their interactions with the intellectual currents of their time. Central to his analysis is the hypothesis that the two authors influenced each other reciprocally, employing concepts as "transculturation" and "plasticity" as fundamental elements in their respective analyses. Overall, Oliveira's research exhibits a pronounced emphasis on the approximation between the two authors.

Oliveira emphasizes the academic and personal trajectories of both authors, situating them within the broader context of the Latin American intellectual field (OLIVEIRA, 2012). Accordingly, this paper aims to compare the major works of each author, scrutinizing the internal intricacies of their respective texts. While Oliveira's initial attempt at approximation is noteworthy, it is now imperative to delve into the differences between the two authors and examine how specific national contingencies are reflected in their writing.

Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar and *Casa Grande & Senzala* stand as pivotal essays on colonial transition and society building within their respective countries. As such, we will highlight their theoretical underpinnings, focusing on the concepts of "transculturation" and "interpenetration." To facilitate this exploration, we refer back to Oliveira's comparison between "transculturation" and "plasticity," as the formulation of such binomial played a significant role in both works. We proceed from the hypothesis that the idea of "transculturation" in Ortiz closely parallels Freyre's notion of "interpenetration." Both concepts center on reciprocity in cultural exchanges, aiming to transcend the idea of "acculturation" or dominance of certain cultures over the others.

The text will be structured into four sections, each focusing on the exploration of these concepts. Firstly, we will compare the influences of Portuguese and Spanish colonization, examining both their similarities and differences, as well as analyzing different sociological implications arising from the distinct patterns of control employed by each Crown. Secondly, we will contrast transculturation and interpenetration, elucidating their relationship with "soft" and "hard" patterns in social life. The third section will delve into transculturation as a universal phenomenon in human history, emphasizing its inevitability in the context of cultural encounters. Lastly, we will demonstrate how the concept of interpenetration is intertwined with the blending of patterns inherent in the purported triple formation of Brazilian culture: with Indigenous, European, and African influences.

1. Portugal and Spain: Bivittelline twins

The fundamental premise of these works is that Brazil was shaped by Portuguese colonization and Cuba was influenced by Spanish colonization, thus reconstituting two similar Iberian models, with considerable specificities. Consequently, there are both similarities and disparities that often lead to the perception that the Spanish Crown exerted strict control, while the Portuguese people displayed adaptability to the colonial conditions, rendering them more "plastic." Fernando Ortiz's conceptual framework revolves around a clear definition of "transculturation," enriched by his emphasis on reciprocity. In contrast, Gilberto Freyre's treatment of cultural exchanges receives less prominence within his conceptual system. This is not to suggest *Casa Grande & Senzala* is less accurate but rather to note that the concept of "interpenetration" does not enjoy

the same level of emphasis or protagonism as the idea of “transculturation.” Nevertheless, it remains imperative to provide a description of life in the sugar cane mills.

Although culturally and politically close, the two Iberian powers approached different characteristics found in their colonies. A common thread in both works is the establishment of sugar plantations. The differences in colonization methods employed by Portugal and Spain are evident in their approaches to both crops. Freyre argued that the Portuguese were less stringent compared to the Spanish (FREYRE, 1987), while Ortiz systematically criticized the intrusive dominance of the Spanish Crown (ORTIZ, 1978). This inflexibility and this malleability serve as a theoretical framework for understanding the two Iberian colonizers.

Sérgio Buarque de Holanda delineated a dichotomy between the “adventurer” and the “worker” which he believed to be inherent in all advanced human societies. According to him, the ethics of adventure and the ethics of work were characterized by mutual denial, with each moral reasoning perceiving the other reasoning as “immoral.” For Holanda, the spirit of boldness prevailed over labor, shaping our culture through the colonizer’s intrepidity. (HOLANDA, 1936, p. 21). He portrayed the Portuguese as exceptionally “plastic” and flexible compared to the Spanish, lacking fixedness evidenced by a lack of pride or racial antipathy. For Freyre, Portuguese blood was mixed-race within Europe itself; breaking color barriers and fostering integration and affability. This perspective corroborates Freyre’s concept of a supposedly balanced distribution of land. The author conceives that Brazil’s colonization was characterized by a dual dynamic that balanced tendencies toward conflict and mitigation efforts.

In *Raízes do Brasil*, this detachment is argued to have led to a distinctly Brazilian amorphism. From this perspective, the colonizer’s leniency rendered Brazilian society spineless. The Portuguese failed to resist the challenges posed by the environment they sought to inhabit. Already pliable, they further acquiesced and, rather than fighting, adapted to their new circumstances. However, this adaptability allowed the Portuguese to achieve success where the Dutch and other Northern Europeans failed in their attempts to colonize the tropics. (HOLANDA, 1936, p. 37-38).

According to Freyre, the “hammock life” (the idleness) favored colonial lordship, eventually evolving into a lifestyle filled with sexual concerns. This communal spirit, rooted in sexuality, facilitated the integration of the colony. Defined by a pronounced aristocratic influence, Portuguese colonization established a system characterized by the unquestionable authority of territorial lords (FREYRE, 1987).

This private dimension stood in contrast to the power wielded by the Spanish Crown. Holanda observed the disparity in the structural layout of Spanish and Portuguese cities. The former refused to conform to the natural landscape and produced legislation to limit urbanization. Whereas the latter would let the city blend into the landscape. (HOLANDA, 1936, p. 62-63). This controlling nature of the Spanish metropolis aligns closely with Ortiz’s perspective. According to Ortiz, in addition to

methodically controlling the territory, Spain promoted the cultivation of sugar crops, thereby hindering the concurrent production of tobacco (ORTIZ, 1978).

The criticism of Portuguese imperial leniency highlighted a divergence between Sérgio Buarque de Holanda and Gilberto Freyre. Holanda argued that the soft colonial approach led to amorphism, while Freyre saw this flexibility as a stabilizing force in the colonial society. Despite initial neglect, the discovery of gold in Minas Gerais prompted external or internal migration, drawing people away from the coast and towards the interior of Brazil. This required more comprehensive control measures, prompting the Portuguese to partly abandon their seaside comfort and maritime preference. According to Holand, the law of opportunity prevailed in Brazil, not the State law.

Gilberto Freyre's work does not contemplate the increased control of the Portuguese Crown. Instead, his reflections showcase a strong interest in the concept of "plasticity" and the aristocratic colonization of Brazil, rather than the State (FREYRE, 1987). Conversely, Fernando Ortiz does not employ the notion of "plasticity;" rather, he explains Cuban miscegenation by highlighting the influence of dynamics inherent in sugar farming. Overall, Ortiz's work allocates less space to this issue, including the mixture of groups involved in the colonization process within his description of "transculturation" (ORTIZ, 1978). Considering this, there emerges the notion that all cultural encounters promote collaboration.

In both works, the bivitelline relationship between Portugal and Spain was characterized by the stricter control imposed over Cuba contrasted with the laid-back and aristocratic nature of Brazilian colonization. These contrasting dimensions are shaped by the disruptive forces of sugarcane agriculture. The absence of a "plastic" colonizer in the Caribbean Island was key for the evaluation of monocultures there. It is noteworthy that both works describe how the sugarcane economy introduced customs and mechanisms that stimulated tension and social conflict. Ortiz's critique is particularly direct, while Freyre offers specific commendation.

2. Transculturation and plasticity: "hard" and "soft" solutions

At this point, it is pertinent to revisit the work of Emerson Divino de Oliveira. As previously mentioned, his thesis initiated a systematic comparison between these two Latin American authors. One of the focal points of his analysis is the correlation between the concepts of "transculturation" and "plasticity." The commonplace between the concepts is that both aim to provide a theoretical framework that counters biologizing narratives and the notion that the Black population is inherently problematic (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 29). He argues that "transculturation," introduced in *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y del Azucar*, and "plasticity," found in the portrayals of the Portuguese in *Casa Grande & Senzala*, are pivotal for understanding their respective cultures.

Ortiz describes transculturation as a gradual phenomenon wherein the encounter of different cultures gives rise to a new, supposedly more genuine, and authentic reality

(ORTIZ, 1978, p. 5). Freyre highlights plasticity as the main feature of Brazilian colonization, wherein the colonizers had an awareness of “bicontinentalism.” In other words, mixed-race, cosmopolitan, and conciliatory Europeans (FREYRE, 1987, p. 226-231). Portugal had a population characterized by plasticity and a greater tendency for miscegenation compared to all other Europeans (FREYRE, 1987, p. 219). This plasticity lies at the genesis of Brazilian culture, rendering impossible the isolation of social groups. Both works offer sociological interpretations that played an important role in shaping national identities in Brazil and Cuba. According to Emerson Oliveira:

These discourses revolve around key concepts: Plasticity, as emphasized by Freyre (wherein the Portuguese are portrayed as more adaptable and malleable, effectively coexisting with Black people and mutually influencing each other), and the concept of Transculturation, as articulated by Ortiz (the notion that original cultures undergo a transition or transformation, resulting in the emergence of a new national culture). (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p.127)

Oliveira believes that “transculturation” entails a system of harmonization devoid of clear hierarchy (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 20-23). It represents a mutually transformative exchange, a reciprocal penetration among different cultural groups. Bronislaw Malinowski introduced the concept of “transculturation” as a necessary semantic endeavor in response to the generalized use of the term “acculturation,” which often carries a hierarchical connotation, implying a loss—an interpretation contrary to that of Fernando Ortiz’s (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 5). Therefore, the concept of transculturation seeks to elucidate the process by which the Cuban society is formed through an encounter of different cultures.

“Plasticity,” in addition to being used while describing only the Portuguese, also reinforces this notion of Lusitanian “bicontinentality.” The interaction with the Arab purportedly gave rise to a peninsular culture, separate from Europe “beyond the Pyrenees” (HOLANDA, 1936). This concept elucidates how the Portuguese were prepared for colonial endeavors due to their contact with the Moors and the existence of a “Mozarabic” identity, making them receptive to blending with other groups. Freyre further claimed that Portuguese prejudice was primarily rooted in religion rather than race, serving as another statement to the adaptability of the colonizer.

We believe the work of Fernando Ortiz does not feature a concept comparable to plasticity, since Ortiz portrays the Spanish Crown and people as representatives of orthodoxy and rigidity during the formation of Cuban society. Even with a large part of the Spanish territory being part of a Moorish Caliphate, Ortiz never suggests in *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azucar* that the Spanish exhibited a plastic character or were softened by their interactions with the Arabs. While Ortiz does explore the presence of mixed-race people and transculturation in Cuba in *Contrapunteo*, there is no depiction of a colonizer willing to get engaged in such process. Although the concept of transculturation implies cultural conciliation, he never portrays the Spanish colonizer as flexible.

According to Oliveira, *Casa Grande & Senzala* illustrates how the Portuguese plasticity helped Brazil avoid the same racial conflicts prevalent in Anglo-Saxon America (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 110-125). Such plasticity was deemed essential for the Portuguese success in tropical regions, allowing for a degree of permissiveness that facilitated a process of “interpenetration” (FREYRE, 1987). Oliveira emphasized the central role of “transculturation” and “plasticity” as criticisms to racist theories (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 174). In his view:

The similarities between Ortiz and Freyre are multiple, notably their efforts to distinguish the concept of Race from the concept of Culture. However, Ortiz initially leaned towards a more pronounced biologism, influenced by his association with Lombroso. In his book, *El Engano de Las Razas*, Fernando Ortiz vehemently repudiated the racism and biologism present in his earlier work. This shift in perspective can be attributed, in both thinkers, to the political climate in Latin America and two key concepts: Gilberto Freyre’s notion of Plasticity, which advocated for better adaptation and integration among the diverse ethnicities in Brazilian, and Fernando Ortiz’s concept of Transculturation, which explored the relationships among multiple cultures in Cuba, formed through interactions between original cultures and the Cuban culture. Both concepts diverge from the idea of Acculturation, wherein the original culture is lost. In the works of Ortiz and Freyre, the encounters between cultures do not result in losses, rather they lead to mutual enrichment for all cultures involved in the encounter. (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 174)

In this paper, we argue that the strongest correlation between the two authors’ works lies in the ideas of “transculturation” and “interpenetration.” These terms focus on the exchange process itself rather than on specific cultural characteristics, such as plasticity. They encompass the broader process of interaction, facilitating an understanding of how multiple cultures intersect and mutually influence one another, leading to the emergence of new cultural formations.

3. Transculturation and the general process of human history

The concept of “transculturation” introduced the notion of reciprocity into cultural encounters, moving away from the one-sided nature inherent to the idea of “acculturation.” Malinowski, Ortiz’s mentor, was invited to write the preface of *Contrapunteo*, where he portrayed the concept as a necessary response to the inaccuracy of terms like “diffusion” and “acculturation.” He argued that these notions were ethnocentric, as they implied a passive adaptation to the cultural norms from a dominant perspective. In contrast, transculturation was depicted as a process of mutual exchange or “give and take” (*toma y daca*) (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 5). This perspective emphasized mutual penetration of cultures, which Malinowski considered essential to the history of civilizations, extending far beyond the Cuban socio-historical context.

The author of this book illustrates how, in all these instances, it is essential to examine both sides of the cultural contact and view this phenomenon holistically as transculturation.

This process entails the merging of each new element, which adopts pre-existing modes while introducing its own exoticisms, thereby generating new ferments. (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 5)

The blending and amalgamation of two different cultural frameworks would give rise to a completely new and independent reality, wherein individuals of Black, Indigenous and white European descent coexist within the same society. In Freyre's work, the original cultures were symbolized by the sugarcane mill, the mansion (*casa grande*) and the slave shanties (*senzala*) representing distinct social strata. Ortiz's focus did not extensively address the relationship between the slave shanties (*barracones*) and the residences of the landlords.

Ortiz found the coexistence of tobacco and sugarcane crops to be the most compelling dichotomy. He noted that the presence of "mulattism" in the sugar industry, characterized by the use of slave labor, led to a conflicting interaction between Black and white individuals. In contrast, tobacco, especially high-quality varieties, remained predominantly under the control of white individuals and was viewed as a genuinely Cuban crop (ORTIZ, 1978).

The first drafts of the concept of transculturation can be traced back to *Entre Cubanos: Psicologia Tropical*, where the notion of "cultural transmigration," stemming from "geographic transmigration" is introduced for the first time. This marks the earliest indication of an interest in the dual effects of cultural encounters, predating *Contrapunteo* (OLIVEIRA, 2012, p. 77). Comprised of texts written between 1906 and 1908, with additional texts from 1911, this work by Ortiz attempts to explore the Cuban national identity and its issues related to homeland and the decline of a republic influenced by imperialist interventionism (ORTIZ, 1986).

This concept of transculturation associated with migratory currents undergoes a transformation into a specific perspective resembling a form of "cultural miscegenation," as noted by Julio Riverend (ORTIZ, 1978). Within this framework, various peoples adapt to the American context through the interaction of their cultures. According to this conceptualization, the very contingents that arrived in Cuba would already embody transcultural characteristics: Black individuals arrived as "enslaved," white individuals as "displaced" and the native peoples as "expropriated." This perspective supports the assertion that transculturation is a universal phenomenon in human history, not limited to the colonization of the New World (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 96).

We find that the term transculturation more accurately conveys the various phases involved in transitioning from one culture to another. Unlike the Anglo-American term *acculturation*, which primarily denotes the acquisition of a different culture, *transculturation* encompasses not only the adoption of a different culture but also the inevitable loss or detachment from one's previous culture. This loss, which can be termed partial *deculturation*, is accompanied by the consequent creation of new cultural phenomena, termed *neoculturation* (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 96).

Drawing from the multifaceted nature of the term, we can grasp Fernando Ortiz's approach in the complementary chapters of *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar*. In these chapters, the author meticulously examines, almost with compulsive diligence, the various forms and uses of Cuban tobacco. Tobacco serves as a common thread for one of the most compelling examples of transculturation experienced by the Cuban people. The Cuban anthropologist illustrates the exchanges between the different groups involved in the colonization of the island through the lens of tobacco. Initially used in a proto-animistic and ritualistic manner by Indigenous people, tobacco evolved into a luxury item found in London's sophisticated cigar shops. This transformation of Cuban tobacco reflects a profound process of transculturation, altering its consumption rituals, prestige, and production methods to the extent that any connection to its original native rituals and the consumption of the so-called original "*habanos*" is lost. Reciprocity materializes as the habit of the conquered people is adopted by the conqueror, fundamentally reshaping the meanings associated with tobacco consumption.

The concept revolves around situating cultural encounters at the borders or frontiers, representing interactions with the Other. In this framework, borders become the focal point for the emergence of new cultural expressions (BHABHA, 2001). This notion of encounter underscores its exclusivity to closed groups, emphasizing the transformative potential when cultures intersect. Ortiz's exploration of Tobacco history exemplifies this notion, portraying it as a tale of habit transmissions from the New to the Old World, epitomizing transculturation. The transition from a communal magical/religious bond to the purely hedonistic, individualistic European consumption underscores evolution (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 204-205). This mutual penetration is portrayed as more democratic, with Indigenous peoples, despite facing massacres, imparting the essence of tobacco to powerful Europe. Consequently, Ortiz's anthropology, akin to Freyre, critiques the unilateral nature of cultural exchange, rejecting terms like assimilation and acculturation in favor of the authors' more nuanced analyses.

The exchange was not a straightforward transition from magic ritual to modern consumption. Tobacco's penetration into European culture faced religious scrutiny, with accusations of "diabolism," "sensualism" and sinfulness associated with smoking. Even amidst religious transculturation, characteristics of the worship by the conquered persist within the victorious belief system. Thus, tobacco's spiritual aspect was also assimilated (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 208-209), partially retaining elements of its religious and healing significance. The initial motives for introducing tobacco in Europe were primarily aesthetic and medicinal, masking its hedonistic appeal. This underscores the persistence of cultural manifestations amid exchange. According to Ortiz, although distinct, the medicinal rationale remained relevant in the spiritual lives of Indigenous people (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 223). The most significant religious shift related to tobacco was its heightened economic value. The trade and demand compelled European to compromise their ethics, leading to a dual process where tobacco both influences and is influenced by transculturation (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 212-214).

Ortiz observed that transculturation in Africa led to the emergence of various other forms of tobacco consumption. He noticed that, as Indigenous practices, African individuals adopted a religious and ritualistic approach to smoking or inhalation. This “Indigenous-African” transculturation of tobacco was facilitated by the close proximity between these groups. In *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar*, Ortiz argued that the transculturation between Indigenous and Black populations was less abrupt because they shared similar ethical and civilizational frameworks (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 215-217). He emphasized this similarity when describing African consumption: “That rite is like smoking without the smoke. It is the ritualistic transmission of a spiritual habit imbued with religious significance, similar to how a priest breathes on a child during baptism to impart the essence of his faith” (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 215-217).

The African tribal structure tended to favor the collectivist consumption patterns. Yet, a striking instance of transculturation emerges when Ortiz examines the role of tobacco in African rituals. In this new cultural background, grass leaves assume a secondary role in ritualistic manifestations, contrasting with the prestige and centrality granted to tobacco in the spiritual myths and rituals of Indigenous people. In Africa, tobacco suffered this transculturation, gaining supporting status in the rituals. (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 218-219).

European transculturation played a pivotal role in Ortiz’s analysis. Apart from underscoring the Catholic condemnation of tobacco’s purported “diabolism,” the Cuban author indicates that sugar also encountered resistance upon its arrival in Europe. Like tobacco, this product was accused of originating from the hands of the non-believers, brought to Christian lands by “Moors,” “Jews” and “Mohammedans” (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 228). Within this context, sugar production in Cuba represented nothing short of the Cuban transculturation of sugar, according to Ortiz, signifying the introduction of foreign industry focused on the ruthless exploitation of the Cuban people and territory. Ortiz highlights several products within this framework, including tea – a millennial tradition in China – cocoa from Mexico, coffee typical of Africa, and tobacco itself. Since these products were all ultramarine, Ortiz suggests that their social trajectory mirrors that of other goods from “people of color.” Also, in *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar*, Ortiz affirms that the European mistake was to resist the influences of other cultures, because it was openness that would have allowed them to explore the new territories, “reviving the spirit of the Old World” (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 231).

According to Ortiz, economic interests played a crucial role in mitigating resistance to tobacco consumption, as money undermined previous restrictions (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 274). The influence of crops on Cuban history was so strong as to reshape the ethics of the clergy, with a portion of this cultural shift attributed to the Church itself. Transculturation, as defined by two-way contact, involves neither absolute losses nor gains from one culture to another. Even in attempts to resist tobacco, religion underwent transformation, adding another dimension to the concept of transculturation. In *Casa*

Grande & Senzala, the notion of “interpenetration” illustrates this inexorability, suggesting a process that is impossible to be prevented.

Ortiz observed that the morphological changes in tobacco consumption (*consumo tabaquero*, in Spanish) were primarily driven by market forces (ORTIZ, 1978, p. 243). While transculturation is a recurring theme in his works, Ortiz did not extensively explore cultural exchange among the groups shaping Cuban society. This might be because much of the contact happened within the sugarcane industry, where high-quality tobacco was seen as a white prerogative. In contrast to Freyre, who extensively examined the interactions among Indigenous, European, and African peoples, Ortiz focused more on cultural practices and objects, shifting attention away from social groups. Now, we will analyze the concept of “interpenetration” and how it elucidates the triple dynamic of Brazil’s racial composition within the sugarcane mills.

4. Interpenetration: Indigenous, European, and African

While Ortiz grounded his concept of “transculturation” with historical examples, Freyre chose a more narrative approach to depicting the formation of Brazilian society. The issue at hand is not a lack of conceptual clarity, as Freyre’s description of relationships in plantations is firmly rooted in the material analyzed. Rather, the challenge lies in Freyre’s reluctance to single out a key concept. “Plasticity” stands as the most elaborated concept in the author’s work, accompanied with the underlying notion of Portuguese “bi-continentality.” As a hybrid product, the colonizers are seen as adapting to the tropical environment rather than imposing their will. Unlike a confrontational approach, the Portuguese displayed flexibility devoid of absolute ideas or rigid prejudices. As Ricardo Benzaquen pointed out, Freyre considered the “flexible nature” to be the Portuguese’s greatest quality (ARAÚJO, 1978, p. 43-46).

To analyze the concept of “interpenetration” as discussed in *Casa Grande & Senzala*, we must adopt a more subtle strategy, particularly concerning the Indigenous influence on the formation of the Brazilian family. Freyre observed that this influence was relatively minor, largely attributed to what he perceived as their limited technical expertise and the immaturity of their cultural manifestations (FREYRE, 1987, p. 125). This perspective on Indigenous individuals is clear in Freyre’s critique of Afrânio Peixoto’s views, which portrayed Indigenous culture as a significant example of philosophical development, classifying them as “star worshippers,” in detriment to the African dendolatry and their exacerbated fetishism. (FREYRE, 1987, p. 309).

Myths and imagination constitute the most enduring elements of Indigenous culture, according to Freyre. Brazilian culture retains aspects of Indigenous practices, such as the dread of spirits and the use of fear for children moralization (FREYRE, 1987, p. 141-161). While Freyre highlights the shower routine and “priapic” nature of the “Indian women’s” customs, he primarily views their cultural influences as confined to tales, enchantment, and desires. In contrast, Portuguese and African influences are

deemed superior to all “Amerindian” cultural aspects. Freyre and Ortiz both assert that Indigenous people were marginalized in sugar production, with the monocrop being a significant factor in their decline.

The Portuguese, on the other hand, are portrayed as the backbone of Brazilian society, introducing institutionality, cosmopolitanism, flexibility in social interactions, land ownership, and slavery. These structures shaped Brazilian society from its early days, along with structure of land ownership, the government and the sugar production system which also derive from their influence (FREYRE, 1987). Freyre suggests that Portuguese proselytism primarily centered around Catholicism, which evolved in the colony due to interpenetration with Indigenous and African cultures. This adaptation led to a distinctively tropical form of Catholicism, diverging from the Spanish austerity. This transformation reflected a broader movement towards a more familial and sentimental religious logic. Lusitanian religious values shaped a colonization model distinct from the ethnocentric Anglo-Saxon model, emphasizing the nation as the “epitome of belief” (FREYRE, 1987, p. 223). Within the sugar cane mill, the landlord’s proximity to the divine was pronounced.

This religious doctrine played a crucial role in maintaining Portuguese cohesion, preventing the dismemberment of its plastic and permeable cultural fabric. The concept of nationality, expressed through steadfast religious devotion, underscores the martial nature of the Lusitanian crusade against heresy. Throughout *Casa Grande & Senzala*, Catholicism is equated with the culture of the colonizers, setting them apart from the Indigenous population. (FREYRE, 1987, p. 225). Despite this, land ownership stood as the sole structure that resisted the Church’s influence, consolidating decision-making power within the “mansion.” Freyre elaborates on the unifying power of faith as follows:

However, prior to the animosity towards the Spanish, as highlighted by Keyserling, another, perhaps more profound and enduring feeling influenced the Portuguese character, leaning it towards nationalism or even imperialism: the hatred towards the Moorish. This same animosity later surfaced in Brazil during the conflicts against the “buggers*” and heretics. Particularly against the heretics, efforts were gathered and antagonist forces aligned. Jesuits and landlords, from São Paulo and Bahia, joined forces against this major common scarecrow. Without this significant shared adversary, perhaps the sense of “species consciousness” would have never been developed among such disparate and politically disconnected groups during the initial outbursts of Lusitanian colonization in Brazil. Moral and political unification was primarily achieved through solidarity among diverse groups against heresy, whether embodied by the French, English or Dutch, or simply “bugger” (FREYRE, 1987, p. 225).

The religious doctrine served as the firm foundation of Portuguese culture, providing a cohesion that was not as strict as in the Spanish Empire. Instead, the Christian faith was viewed as a source of resistance and autonomy in face of encounters

* T.N.: Free translation of the term “bugre”, a generic and offensive term used in Brazil in the past, to refer to a person of indigenous origin who is prejudicially considered to be violent, or to refer to a rude, primitive, uncivilized individual.

with non-Christian cultures. In Brazil, this sentiment clashed with the Indigenous and enslaved populations. The aversion to heresy spurred catechization and missionary efforts. Concurrently, disdain for royalty fostered a scenario of intense cultural exchange, allowing the Africans to contribute to the emerging colonial culture (FREYRE, 1987, p. 312). According to Freyre, Black individuals were responsible for reforming food supply, previously inadequate and precarious. They also exerted considerable influence in softening the demeanor of the colonizer, including the language. Converted into merchandise in the sugar monocrop slavery system, African Black individuals were subjected to the colonizer's vulgarity. Freyre attributes this power of the landlords to the perceived passivity of the "mulatta" (FREYRE, 1987, p. 313-370).

According to Freyre, the "fula-fulos," an ethnicity predominantly present in the Northern region of Brazil, represented the most skilled and intelligent contingents, contributing significantly to the mix-raced families of the Northeast. Additionally, Black individuals were deemed to be best suited to the climate and lifestyle of the tropics (FREYRE, 1987, p. 310-322). These shifts in emphasis mark the narrative of *Casa Grande & Senzala* regarding the formation of national society, highlighting even further the causes and effects of interpenetration. Freyre suggests that African influence shaped various aspects, including planting techniques, cuisine, and sexuality.

One of the most sensitive aspects of interpenetration was the transformation of the Portuguese language spoken in the colony. Freyre suggests that the African influence played a significant role in the establishment of a distinctive and revitalized vocabulary. The language spoken in the colony was so genuine, according to Freyre, that it almost represented a new linguistic model—a uniquely Brazilian language. Interpenetration facilitated a harmonious blending of antagonistic cultural elements within the national culture (FREYRE, 1987, p. 344-355).

The Portuguese and Africans underwent a transformation, taking on distinctly Brazilian characteristics. The colonizers witnessed their religious practice adopt even less strict outlines, gaining emotional content and becoming intertwined with everyday life; they saw their religious orthodoxy adapt to the realities of human scarcity and slavery, leading to a pervasive emphasis on procreation. In Freyre's typical vernacular, this shift can be described as a transition from Christian to pagan sexuality, influenced by the demands of colonial life (FREYRE, 1987, p. 270). Overall, Brazilian Catholicism became more adaptable to miscegenation, reflecting the demographic challenges faced in the metropolis.

The process of slavery underwent significant transculturation, particularly prior to its introduction to the colony. Freyre extensively examines the Portuguese origin and inclinations in *Casa Grande & Senzala*. Among these inclinations was slavery, which became typically Portuguese following their interactions with the Moors. The author argues that the Portuguese adopted the practice of enslavement from the Arabs, adapting it to their colonizing endeavors. However, he cautions against the detrimental effects of this process, emphasizing how this growing drive for slavery, shaped by

Portuguese culture, ultimately turned against the Moors themselves (FREYRE, 1987, p. 236-239).

When considering the transculturation of elements from African cultures, Gilberto Freyre highlights one final trace of their penetration: African cuisine. This culinary tradition, now widespread in Brazil, has evolved into distinct regional manifestations, giving rise to local culinary systems. Despite being rooted in African cuisine, these local adaptations have contributed to the development of a unique national food matrix (FREYRE, 1987, p. 467-470). Although Freyre's focus on the concept of interpenetration differs from Ortiz's emphasis on transculturation, both scholars employ similar explanatory mechanisms on the sociogenesis of their respective colonial societies.

Conclusion

The aforementioned demonstrates significant compatibility between the concepts of "transculturation" and "interpenetration" in the works by Fernando Ortiz and Gilberto Freyre. These works, *Contrapunteo Cubano del Tabaco y el Azúcar* and *Casa Grande & Senzala*, respectively, explore the national and political formations of Spanish and Portuguese societies, revealing internal differences within the Iberian Peninsula. Despite distinct perspectives, both texts converge on the analysis of national integration in Cuba and Brazil. Ortiz portrays Cuba's colonization as very strict, while Freyre highlights Brazil's plastic colonizer as a great driver of cultural integration. Despite these differing viewpoints, both authors seemed committed to describing a similar phenomenon, albeit in different scales.

The concept of "interpenetration" illustrates the blending of cultural habits, institutions, beliefs, techniques, and rituals among the groups involved in Brazilian colonization (FREYRE, 1987). Similarly, "transculturation" demonstrates a reciprocal influence between European and Indigenous trends in Cuba (ORTIZ, 1978). In Freyre's case, the focus on sugar production narrowed his scope. The concept of "interpenetration" allowed him to explore this phenomenon without extending beyond the confines of the plantation. In contrast, Ortiz examined the national context, acknowledging the disaggregated influence of sugar while elevating tobacco as a positive element. While Ortiz did not emphasize the transculturation of sugar, he criticized the logic associated with this type of agriculture, portraying tobacco as genuine and national, and sugar as foreign and intrusive.

While the sugar industry facilitated cultural encounters in both contexts, it also introduced disruptive elements through its system of landownership and enslaved monoculture. Ortiz's emphasis on the transculturation of tobacco contrasts with his reluctance to focus on sugar. Conversely, Freyre's concept of interpenetration suggests a more balanced cultural exchange in Brazil. Both authors developed anthropological models to understand their countries and recently formed society, with very diverse influences. The manifestation of these concepts in their works reflects the dynamic

relationship between Brazil and Cuba as typical bivittelline twins characterized by similarities and relevant idiosyncrasies. This resemblance extends to the concepts explored by the authors. While this paper focused on the ideas of two prominent intellectuals, the comparison between these societies can and should extend beyond these boundaries. Therefore, we believe that both countries have significant potential from interdisciplinary comparisons, particularly concerning culture and racial issues.

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